

THE REALM OF SPORT ORIGINS

Soccer in Ancient China

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Association Football, known internationally as “Soccer” and the most popular team sport in the world, had a precedent in ancient China which was called “Cuju” (ball-kicking) and has a recorded history of more than 2,500 years.

During the Western Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-8 A.D.) Cuju became an influential sport participated in by a variety of people. The sport itself had experienced a series of changes in terms of its facilities, rules, and playing forms.

In the Han Dynasty, Cuju was played in team competition according to a set of rules. In the Tang Dynasty (618-907) the sport was played without direct body contact for the players were separated by a net; the ball was made of eight pieces of leather inflated with air. This ancient soccer was also an individual sport for the purpose of recreation, connected to some traditional festivals. It should also be noticed that it was played by women as well as men in ancient times. Unfortunately this once popular sport declined and became almost extinct during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

This paper is intended to describe and analyze the development of Cuju over this period of time.